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### **NJMC Receives Preliminary Report on New Jersey Audubon Society's Meadowlands Bird Survey**

*New data will allow the NJMC to track its bird population more accurately*

LYNDHURST, N.J. – The New Jersey Meadowlands Commission today received initial results from the first part of a two-year survey of the bird population in the Meadowlands District.

The purpose of the study, conducted by the New Jersey Audubon Society, is to obtain a scientifically accurate survey of the birds found in the Meadowlands District. The NJMC will use this information to base future decisions on habitat restoration and other initiatives.

“This preliminary report confirms that our ecosystem is hosting a wide variety of important bird species, and reassures us that the recovery of the Meadowlands is truly taking hold,” said NJMC Chair Susan Bass Levin, also the Commissioner of the New Jersey Department of Community Affairs. “This comprehensive study will allow us to accurately track our bird population and develop more effective management strategies to continue the synergy between the urban areas surrounding the Meadowlands and natural conservation.”

The first year of the avian study was conducted from August 2004 to August 2005, with 118 points at 28 different locations surveyed over that time period. Each point was visited once every two weeks throughout the year. A total of 80,261 birds, representing 181 different species, were observed. Of those 181 species, 29 species, or 1,191 individual birds, are on the state's endangered, threatened or species of concern lists. All surveys followed protocols in federal wildlife inventory and monitoring procedure guidelines for birds. The second year of the study will be completed in August 2006.

“The Meadowlands Commission is to be commended for its vision and implementation of robust science-based planning,” said Tom Gilmore, president of the New Jersey Audubon Society. “The Commission is leading the nation in creating economic prosperity through urban conservation and restoration. Birds are a critical bio-indicator for ecological integrity and quality of life.”

Bald eagles are one of the noted threatened and endangered species that were spotted during the first year of the report, as well as Cooper's Hawks, Osprey and Peregrine

Falcons. Bobolinks were seen in abundance, with more than 400 seen over the year, and Northern Harriers were seen at 56 of the viewing locations.

Some of the most frequently observed species throughout the Meadowlands, according to the study, include Red-winged Blackbirds, Herring Gulls, Mallards, Song Sparrows, Ring-billed Gulls, European Starlings, Barn Swallows, Red-tailed Hawks, Great Egrets, Snowy Egrets, and Double-crested Cormorants.

In December 2005, the NJMC commissioned the NJAS to conduct a second avian study which will look for levels of contaminants in some of these birds. Researchers will search for amounts of heavy metals including lead, chromium and mercury, as well as organic contaminants like PCBs and DDTs, found in the birds' tissues, feathers, blood and other matter. Breeding success also will be examined to determine best management practices.

"The study presented today will allow us to put sound science behind what local birders have known for years – that the Hackensack Meadowlands is an important place for our feathered friends and a vital stop on the Atlantic Flyway," said NJMC Executive Director Robert Ceberio. "Along with our aquatic life study completed last year and a number of other advanced initiatives already under way, this information will help us make better decisions in the future by taking an evidence-based approach to policy making."

The NJMC's Board of Commissioners also received a report from the Hackensack Riverkeeper, on the Meadowlands Festival of Birding in 2005. The yearly event, geared towards birders, celebrates the Meadowlands region's reputation as a major stop on the Atlantic Flyway and a popular location for eco-tourists to watch the many threatened and endangered species found in the District. It has been held up as an example of the interest the Meadowlands' bird population draws and potential for tourism dollars. Last year's event was coordinated by the Hackensack Riverkeeper and the New Jersey Audubon Society.

This year's event is scheduled for Sept. 16 and will feature a day-long calendar of events including walking and boat tours, workshops and more. The keynote speaker is Jim Fitzpatrick, who spotted an Ivory-billed Woodpecker, a species that was believed to be extinct.

A presentation was also made by the Meadowlands Regional Chamber of Commerce demonstrating the added value the regional tourism push, partially led by the NJMC, is bringing to the District's hospitality industry.

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